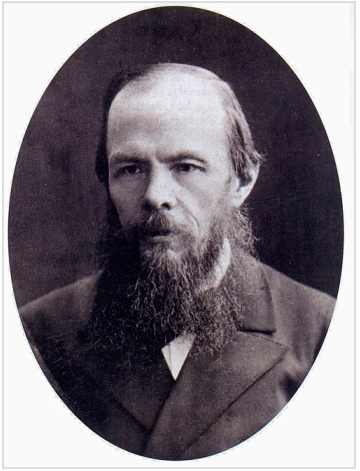
The existence of ecstatic seizures, including those of Dostoevsky, was initially denied by some well-known epileptologists, such as Gastaut and others.[1][5][37][38][39][18] This has been attributed to limited documentation of the seizures, which is in turn related to the fact that people with the auras are often reluctant to talk about the experiences and refrain from communicating them.[5][2][4][1] This is due to the ineffability of the experiences or inability to convey them in words, their extremely abnormal nature (termed "hallucination of emotion"), and fears of being seen as being mentally deranged or as having psychiatric disorders.[5][2][4][1] The ability to communicate the subjective experience of ecstatic auras is also highly dependent on a person's intelligence, power of introspection, and vocabulary.[1][5][6][34]



Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881; photo in 1879).

By 2016, 52 cases of ecstatic epilepsy had been reported in the medical literature.[2][1][4] They have usually been reported as single cases.[2][4][5] In-depth characterizations of the experiences of such patients have been published.[5][9][14][3][1] It is thought that the incidence of ecstatic seizures is greatly underestimated, in part due to the reluctance of people to talk about them.[1][4][5] It is known that approximately 1% of people with temporal lobe epilepsy report religious or spiritual experiences associated with their epilepsy, though these are distinct from ecstatic seizures.[20]

Ecstatic seizures have been especially studied, reviewed, and brought greater attention to by Swiss neuroscientist Fabienne Picard and her colleagues beginning in 2009 and continuing to the present.[5][10][1][4][2][9][40][15][16] The involvement of the dorsal anterior insula in ecstatic seizures was elucidated by her team in 2009 and thereafter.[5][10][1][4][2][9][40][15][16] Cases of electrical brain stimulation inducing the experiences were published in 2013, 2019, and 2022.[6][15][16] There have also been unpublished cases, for a total of six or seven cases (both with and without ecstatic epilepsy) as of 2023.[2]

Society and culture

Notable individuals

The 19th-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky had epilepsy and experienced ecstatic seizures.[1][4][5][19][41] Ecstatic seizures have often been referred to as "Dostoevsky's epilepsy" as he was the first and among the most notable documented cases of the condition.[13][41][42][43] Dostoevsky had an average of about one seizure a month from age 20 or 25 years until his death at 59 years of age, which would be a total of around 400 to 500 seizures in his lifetime.[36][18][44]

Some historical leading religious figures have been suspected and theorized to have possibly had ecstatic epilepsy.[2] These include Saint Teresa of Ávila,[45] Saint Paul the Apostle,[46][47] Joan of Arc,[40][48][49][50] and Ramana Maharshi.[2][19]

Popular media

A character in the James Cameron film *Avatar 2* (2022), named Kiri, experiences an epileptic seizure that results in "religious ecstasy".[2]

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External links

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- Dostoyevsky's Dance With Epilepsy: Seizures, Explained - The Brain Docs (19 April 2023) (https://thebraindocs.com/seizures-and-epilepsy-explained/)
- Epilepsy & Ecstatic Symptoms | Presentation by Dr. Fabienne Picard, 2019 06 22 - Plum Village - YouTube (22 June 2019) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M16k8Djz29A)
- MLE Friends webinar: "Epilepsy and Ecstatic Experience" with Dr. Fabienne Picard - Mind & Life Europe - YouTube (25 June 2022) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sv3iu7OiuuQ)
- Mind On Fire: Exploring Seizures and The Story of Fyodor Dostoevsky - The Brain Docs - YouTube (24 April 2023) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcvE2vP452Y)

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